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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

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U. S. Department of Agriculture.

Wednesday, July 15, 1936

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "DOMESTIC OR IMPORTED?" Information about Swiss and other types of cheese now made in this country. From the Bureau of Dairy Industry, United States Department of Agriculture.

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Not long ago a man sat down at a restaurant table and ordered Swiss cheese and crackers.

"Domestic or imported?" asked the waiter. "Domestic."

The waiter brought the cheese. The customer looked at it. "This isn't Swiss cheese," he protested. "It hasn't any holes."

"No, sir," said the waiter. "The imported Swiss cheese has the holes. The domestic kind comes in bricks and..."

"Domestic Swiss cheese does have holes!" roared the customer. "Send for the manager!"

I heard about this conversation, so I asked Dr. L. A. Rogers, who is in charge of the cheese research laboratories of the Bureau of Dairy Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture, who was right.

"The customer was right," he said. "Domestic Swiss cheese should have holes exactly like the imported Swiss cheese. There are more variations in grade in the domestic Swiss cheese on our markets, because only the top grade of the imported Swiss cheese comes in, but all grades have holes. Swiss-type cheeses are graded and the price is determined by the appearance of the cheese, especially the eyes, because if the eyes, or holes are right, it is almost certain the flavor will be satisfactory.

"There's a great deal of Swiss cheese made in this country, you know, especially in Ohio and Southern Wisconsin. Many of the cheesemakers were born in Switzerland and trained in the shadow of the Alps. They have retained their language and customs, and no convention of Swiss cheese makers is complete without its yodeling and wrestling and gymnastic contests. It takes men of more than ordinary physique and constitution to withstand the hard work and long hours of a Swiss-cheese maker. In addition to the work of cheesemaking, long rows of 175 pound cheeses have to be taken from the shelves daily, turned over, and put back.

"One reason why the art of making Swiss cheese has brought so many natives of Switzerland here is that the process is quite complicated. It requires very delicate control of conditions, including the temperature at various stages and the bacterial fermentation which produces the holes. Long experience enables these native Swiss-cheese makers to recognize the proper stage for each step of the process. Anyone who has followed the intricate balance which must be maintained to obtain Swiss cheese of good quality is impressed by these men





who learned how to control the process before scientists explained the reasons for their results.

"These same cheesemakers have adopted modern ways. They now use commercial rennet instead of dried rennet from a calf's stomach soaked in whey. Three pure cultures of bacteria from a laboratory take the place of chance inoculation."

"I still want to know about one point, Dr. Rogers," I said. "Just what kind of cheese did that waiter bring that man?"

"Processed Swiss cheese," was the answer. "A practice has developed recently of grinding up the poorer grades of cheese, melting the mixture, and running it into molds to form a convenient package for marketing. This processed cheese has no holes and lacks the flavor of true Swiss cheese."

"Do we make any other European types of cheese in this country?" I inquired.

"Yes, several. The process for making what you doubtless call 'American cheese' originated in Cheddar, England, but the cheese is extensively made here. Then we make domestic Limburger and Camembert, Roquefort, cream cheeses like Neufchatel, and many others. Making Roquefort cheese gave our scientists quite a problem, for the French Roquefort is made from sheep's milk and ripened in the damp limestone caverns in Southern France. The Bureau of Dairy Industry found that very good Roquefort cheese could be made from cow's milk, since we have practically no source of sheep's milk in sufficient amount. This domestic Roquefort cheese is ripened in curing rooms in which the temperature and humidity are controlled artificially.

"We know of a farmer on the Pacific Coast mountains who has been making a good Roquefort from goat's milk which he ripens in a room built in a large spring of very cold water. Yes, right in the spring. The water not only flows around and under the room, but a flume carries it onto a flat roof so that it pours over the walls, and in its fall turns a wheel connected with a fan to circulate the air inside.

"News has also come to us of Roquefort curing caves cut in the damp sandstone bluffs along the Mississippi near St. Paul. Another plant has its curing room in an abandoned coal mine shaft in Pennsylvania. It has been white-washed and fitted with partitions and dampers, and makes an excellent curing room. The air forced through the wet shafts of the mine by the mine fan maintains this room at 48 degrees Fahrenheit, with an humidity near the saturation point.

"Well, I hardly expect the women to be as much interested in the making of these cheeses as in selecting them. When you get a domestic brand of a type of cheese which is also imported, you are very likely to get a product developed by painstaking scientific methods, made in a factory that aims at high grade, uniform results. But even though all these cheese factories are producing more each year, we eat less cheese as a nation, per capita, than European natives do."

"I'm going to buy some of that domestic Swiss cheese with holes in it before I'm twenty-four hours older," I declared.

